

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTHWEST BORDER: HAVING THE DESIRED EFFECT?

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 18-03-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE National Strategy for the Southwest Border: Having the Desired Effect?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Mark S. Lovejoy				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Mr. George Millan U. S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
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15. SUBJECT TERMS Mexican Drug Wars, Drug Trafficking, Drug Cartel, Mérida Initiative					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 32	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTHWEST BORDER:
HAVING THE DESIRED EFFECT?**

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Mark S. Lovejoy

TITLE: National Strategy for the Southwest Border:
Having the Desired Effect?

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 18 March 2011 WORD COUNT: 6,426 PAGES: 32

KEY TERMS: Mexican Drug Wars, Drug Trafficking, Drug Cartel, Mérida Initiative

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Over the past two years, the Mexican government has experienced a drastic increase in violence stemming from the drug cartels within their nation. Simultaneously, the United States has seen an increase of violent crimes in cities and towns along the southwest border. This paper examines the research and technical reports on the drug cartels to better understand their composition and objectives. Understanding their composition and objectives is fundamental to assessing the effectiveness of U.S. policies aimed at reducing violence and the amount of drugs entering the United States. Because the U.S. views this increase in violence as a growing threat to its national security, this paper will analyze the effectiveness of the U.S. national strategies, in particular those aimed at reducing the flow of drugs, and whether they meet the following objectives: to effectively disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations, to substantially reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S., and to improve U.S.–Mexican cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts. It will conclude with recommendations to improve the effectiveness of these policies to ensure the security of our southwest border, which is essential in a post 9/11 environment.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTHWEST BORDER: HAVING THE DESIRED EFFECT?

The United States continues to look for ways to improve its National Strategy for securing the Southwest Border, as drug-related violence being waged in Mexico by the drug cartels has dramatically increased since 2006. This violence is rapidly becoming a vital national security issue for American policymakers who must immediately develop effective policies that will secure the United States' southern region from this violence. A *Wall Street Journal* article stated that "the Obama administration sees the drug-related violence sweeping Mexico as a growing threat to U.S. national security."¹ President Obama's first priority is to secure the homeland. In a statement made upon the passage of the Southwest Border Security Bill in August 2010, President Obama said:

I have made securing our Southwest Border a top priority since I came to office. That is why my administration has dedicated unprecedented resources and personnel to combating the transnational criminal organizations that traffic in drugs, weapons, and money, and smuggle people across the border with Mexico.²

The American people want something done about securing the Southwest Border as a recent CNN Poll indicated that "nearly nine out of ten Americans want to beef up U.S. law enforcement along the border with Mexico."³ Today, more than any time in recent history, we have the political and public support to provide the necessary resources to secure the Southwest Border and protect the American public from the second and third order effects from the drug wars in Mexico.

Mexican President Felipe Calderón has been very aggressive in dealing with the drug cartels. The United States must take advantage of this opportunity and join him in fighting these cartels. This collaborative effort would provide stability to the Mexican

Government and protection for our nation against drugs, illegal entry into the United States by drug and human traffickers, and terrorist organizations scouting for easy access to the United States.

Violence spilling over into the United States along its Southwest Border will become increasingly more apparent if the drug cartel threats are not immediately addressed. In a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report for Congress in April 2009, U.S Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano noted “that there already has been a limited increase in drug-related violence in the United States,(...) but maintained that the increase is not the same kind or nearly the same scale as in Mexico.”⁴ The Federal Bureau of Investigation has reported that kidnappings, beatings, and murders in the Mexican cities of Tijuana and Juarez are spilling over into the United States cities along the Southwest Border. For instance, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that between October 2008 and September 2009, 42 people were kidnapped in McAllen, TX, compared to 11 people kidnapped the previous year.⁵ Security of the Southwest Border is paramount for the United States to maintain security over its homeland.

The drug cartels in Mexico have become more organized and sophisticated and are using violence to intimidate rival cartels for control of the drug trafficking corridors and the Mexican federal forces that are determined to disrupt their operations. Mexican authorities have seen the violence increase dramatically as the competition to control these areas by the cartels is producing violence such as beheading and brutal murders. One reason for the increase of violence is the vast amount of money at stake in controlling these drug trafficking corridors. “Estimates of annual profits from illicit drug

sales range from 25 to 40 billion dollars, or up to 5 percent of Mexico's GDP—twice the value of remittances by Mexican migrants.”⁶ Understanding the composition of the drug cartels and gaining an understanding of their strategy and means are fundamental to assessing the effectiveness of the United States' policies aimed at disrupting and dismantling the cartels to reduce the amount of drugs entering the United States.

This paper will analyze the effectiveness of the U.S. National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy and the multi-lateral Mérida Initiative, in particular those objectives aimed at securing the Southwest Border, and whether they meet the following strategic objectives: (1) effectively disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations, (2) substantially reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the United States, and (3) improve United States–Mexican cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts. After careful analysis of the effectiveness of these objectives, recommendations will be given to improve the ability of the United States to meet its strategic objectives. Attaining these objectives is critical to establishing security along our Southwest Border, ensuring the United States will not experience a “spillover” of violence in our southern States, and denying access to terrorist organizations wanting to use drug trafficking corridors to gain entry into the United States.

Background

The drug cartels operating in Mexico have become more powerful since the fall of the Medellín and Cali Cartels in Colombia. In recent years, Mexican drug cartels have become more sophisticated, more violent, better armed, and have been very successful at establishing their networks throughout the United States. A study conducted by the *Center for a New American Security*, stated that “criminal networks linking cartels and gangs are no longer simply a crime problem, but a threat that is

metastasizing into a new form of widespread, networked criminal insurgency.”⁷ To highlight the severity of the drug cartels’ ability to network with criminal gangs from the United States, the United States Department of Justice reported in their *National Drug Threat Assessment 2010* that:

Mexican [Drug Trafficking Organizations] DTOs increased their cooperation with U.S.-based street gangs to distribute drugs....In 2009, midlevel and retail drug distribution in the United States was dominated by more than 900,000 criminally active gang members representing approximately 20,000 domestic street gangs in more than 2,500 cities.⁸

This is a large increase in the number of affected cities, compared to the 230 cities reported in 2008, and illustrates how quickly the Mexican drug cartels are expanding their distribution capability into the United States. If the United States government fails to address the impact of the Mexican drug cartels’ association with criminal gangs working within their borders, then drug networks will continue to expand throughout the United States.

Currently, there are six major drug cartels operating in Mexico: Gulf Cartel, Sinaloa Federation, Tijuana Cartel, Juárez Cartel, Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO), and the Los Zetas. Though not the only drug cartels operating in Mexico these cartels are responsible for “a variety of illicit drugs: cocaine, heroin, marijuana and, increasingly in recent years, synthetics”⁹ entering the United States. As Figure 1 illustrates, they operate throughout the Southwest Border and are controlling the drug trafficking routes into the United States. The status and strength of the drug cartels change rapidly depending on the results of government operations against a particular cartel. For instance, the Mexican government successfully arrested or killed many of the Gulf Cartel leaders, which weakened the Gulf Cartel. At the same time the Sinaloa

Federation that filled the void left by the Gulf Cartel became a stronger and more powerful drug trafficking organization.

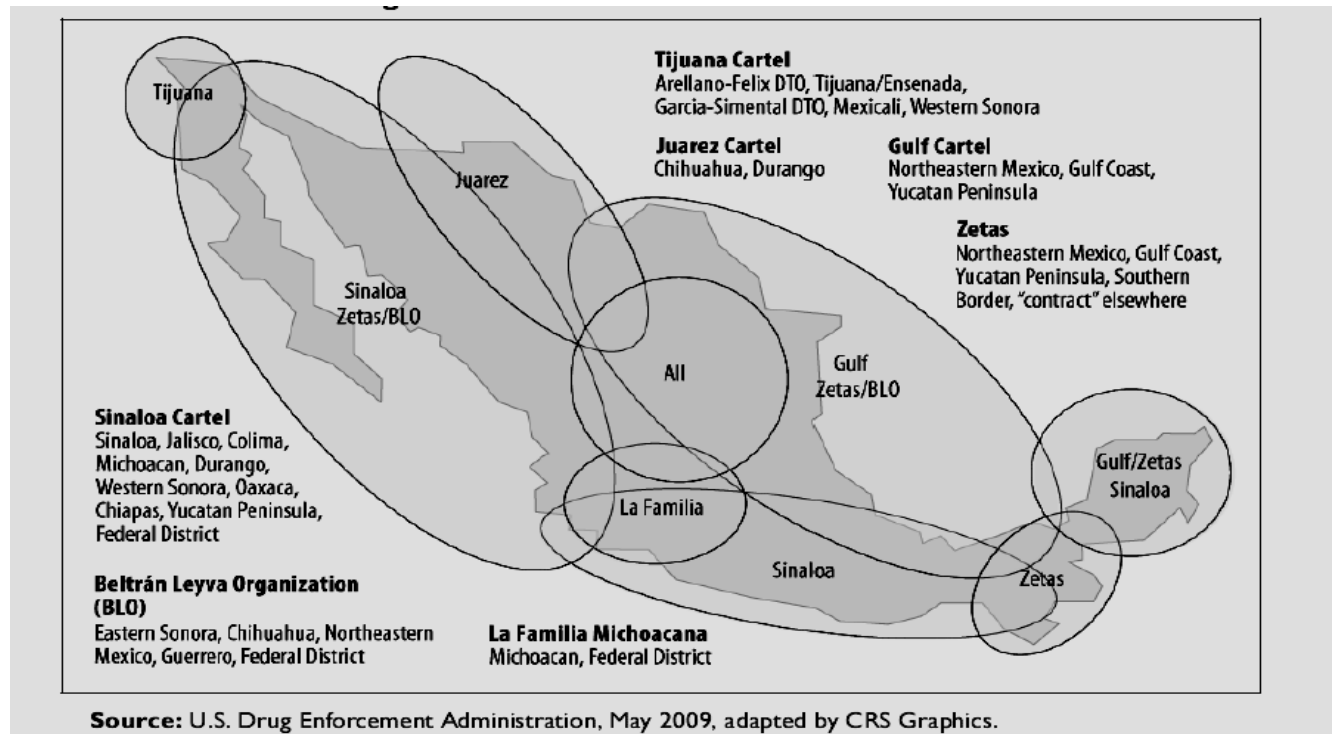


Figure 1: Mexican Cartel Area of Influence¹⁰

The Mexican Drug Cartels have a singular objective and that is to increase their profits through illegal activities. Prior to 2000, the cartels were able to operate their drug business with little or no government intervention. During this period, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which was founded in 1929, held power in Mexico for more than 70 years. It was originally a socialist party, but its modern policies turned it into a more centrist or neoliberal party. While the Institutional Revolutionary Party was in power there was "an overall policy of accommodation, according to numerous accounts. Under this system, arrests and eradication took place, but due to the effects of widespread corruption, the system was characterized by a working relationship between

Mexican authorities and drug lords.”¹¹ Using Mexico as their base of operations allowed the cartels to operate freely and to fill the United States’ demand for illegal drugs.

However, much has changed for the drug cartels since 2000 with the election of President Vicente Fox, which ended 71 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (RPI). Since 2000, the administrations of President Fox (2000-2006) and President Calderón (2006-Present) have addressed the problem of drug cartels in their country. Some argued that President Fox’s administration did not effectively deal with the drug cartels. A 2009 *Congressional Research Service* report stated that under President Fox “the federal police force was purged and reorganized and a more aggressive approach was taken in fighting the drug trafficking organizations including more arrests, increased seizures of drug shipments and the extradition of major drug kingpins.”¹² However, during the later years of President Fox’s term, the violence in Mexico increased because these new policies disrupted the drug cartels ability to move their drugs.

There is little doubt that when President Calderón took office his top agenda was to disrupt and defeat the drug cartels in Mexico. His aggressive approach to quell the cartels by using military forces resulted in some success at disrupting the drug cartels’ criminal activities. There is evidence that the action he took has had an impact on the cartels’ profit margin and has weakened some cartels by killing or capturing their leadership.¹³ At the same time, however, there has been an increase in violence by the cartels aimed at the government, reports of human abuse by the Mexican military and increased violence against the civilians located in the contested northern States.

Due to wars between rival drug cartels for control of drug trafficking corridors and to the success of the Mexican government, some drug cartels have been weakened and have experienced reduced profits. However, there are indications that these cartels are adjusting to their declining profits by pursuing criminal enterprises other than drug trafficking. At a recent United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, Senator Chuck Grassley's opening remarks stated that "DTOs are not the drug cartels of yesterday that only sought to move drugs in and money out. DTOs are interested in expanding their criminal enterprise to any available outlet, be it smuggling drugs, money, people, or weapons."¹⁴ This is an important trend because many critics believe that there is not enough emphasis placed on reducing the drug demand in the United States, which they believe is critical to defeating the drug cartels. However, the drug cartels are adapting and moving into other criminal enterprises such as kidnapping, human trafficking, extortion, and prostitution. The drug cartels' ability to use their networks to push illegal activities into the United States will continue, regardless of the product they are pushing, unless they are disrupted and their networks are dismantled.

As drugs and human smuggling are moving north along the corridors from Mexico into the United States, bulk cash and weapons are flowing along the same corridors from the United States to Mexico. The availability of weapons smuggled into Mexico from the United States has contributed to the increase of violence since 2006. "The Mexican government estimates that 2,000 firearms are smuggled across the Southwest border daily."¹⁵ The ability of drug cartels to purchase weapons is unlimited due to the vast amounts of cash they receive from drug smuggling. "Drug cartel enforcers are purchasing semiautomatic versions of AK-47 and AR-15 style assault

rifles and other military-style weapons including .50 caliber sniper rifles in the United States.”¹⁶ The U.S. can assist the Calderón government by using its resources to secure the Southwest Border and deny weapons and cash from moving south into the hands of the cartels.

Control of the drug corridors into the United States is another reason for the increase in violence between the drug trafficking organizations. During a United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control hearing, Senator Dianne Feinstein commented:

Mexican drug trafficking organizations are fighting for control of lucrative smuggling routes into the United States and in Mexico. The National Drug Intelligence Center estimates that Mexican and Colombian drug cartels make upwards of \$18 to \$39 billion in wholesale drug proceeds from the United States.¹⁷

The cartel that is able to control these corridors will experience wealth and power. For this reason, the cartels wage brutal wars against one another for control. Reports of decapitation, torture, and excessive brutality are becoming common in Mexico as the cartels battle for these areas.

Narco-Insurgency or Criminal Activity?

The increase of drug related violence in Northern Mexico by the drug cartels against government officials, law enforcement, and the military is having an adverse effect on the Mexican government’s ability to provide a safe and secure environment for its people. Some experts are stating that the Mexican government is dealing with an insurgency; for example, Hal Brands, from the Strategic Studies Institute, stated, “as part of what might be described as a multi-sided narco-insurgency, well financed cartels are doing battle with the government and one another for control of the drug corridors into the United States.”¹⁸ However, others still see this as criminal activity such as June

S. Beittel, who wrote in a Congressional Research Service report to Congress that “the goal of the traffickers is to corrupt the police and government at all levels to allow them to pursue illicit profits, but it is not to take control of the apparatus of the state.”¹⁹ The drug trafficking organizations are using extreme violence, and some of their tactics, such as beheadings and bombings, can be compared to those tactics used by the insurgencies in Columbia and Iraq. However, their objective is to create a chaotic situation to weaken government oversight of areas they want to control, especially the drug trafficking corridors entering into the United States. The drug cartels objective is not to overthrow the government by force, but to weaken the government so they can maintain control of their territories.

Since President Calderón began his anti-drug campaign in 2006, the drug cartels have responded with more violence and have increased their attacks against the government forces in an effort to control the drug corridors. The cartels are using violence to intimidate local officials, as evidenced by a September 2010 *Bloomberg Businessweek* article reporting that a “gunmen killed the mayor of a town in northern Mexico as he sat at his desk, the third politician slain in the past month as drug-related violence escalates.”²⁰ This violence is taking place in northern States, such as Tamaulipas, which are key drug trafficking corridors entering the United States.

In addition to controlling these areas, the cartels have a political objective as they ratchet up the violence. Their objective is not just to kill and intimidate the local law enforcement in order to control the drug trafficking corridors and protect their lucrative drug business. The violence serves another purpose: “to sow fear and demonstrate that the cartels—not the government—are dominant in Mexico. Many drug-related killings

are spectacularly violent, aimed at achieving the maximum psychological impact.”²¹ An example of this brutality occurred when “the Zetas stuffed four Nuevo Laredo police officers inside barrels of diesel fuel and burned them to death.”²² As this type of violence becomes more common, it is having a devastating psychological effect on the Mexican people. The drug cartels are sending the message that they control the area and they can kill anyone at anytime.

John Sullivan from the Center for Advanced Studies on Terrorism identified the impact of the drug cartels when he stated that:

Mexican cartels have employed psychological operations, fomented anti-government protests, attacked both police and military in infantry-style assaults, assassinated political officials [and] journalists, beheaded and maimed their victims, to amplify the strategic impact of their attacks, and co-opted and corrupted the military, police and political officials at all levels of government.²³

Figure 2 illustrates just how much the violence has escalated since 2006 with the drug-related killings in 2008 increasing almost four times the number in 2006.

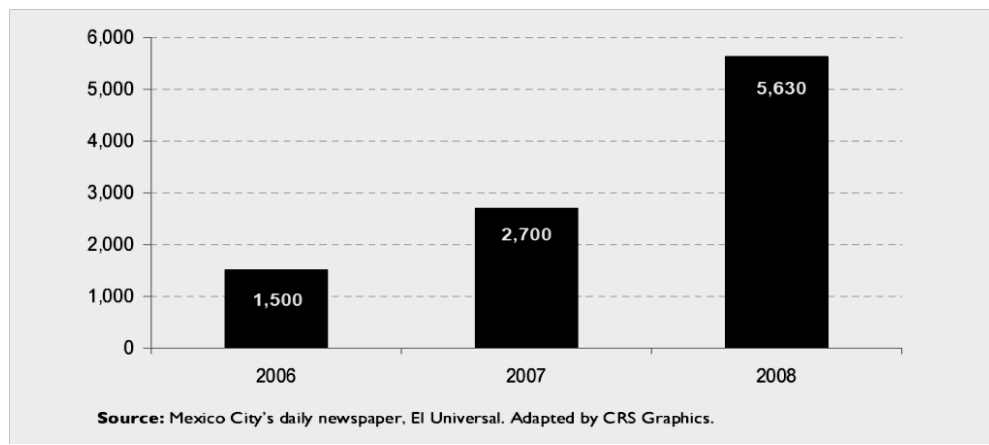


Figure 2: Cartel-Related Killings 2006-2008²⁴

When elected President in December 2006, President Calderón implemented several new strategies to directly combat the drug cartels, which were creating

instability within the country as they worked to control the northern drug trafficking corridors. These strategies have produced successful results against the drug cartels; paradoxically, they have also produced a dramatic increase in violence (see Figure 2). His new strategies include deploying federal troops, extradition reform, combining the Federal Security Police and Investigation Agency under one commander, addressing corruption, and new rules for currency transactions to curb money laundering. President Calderón made combating the drug cartels the highest priority of his administration.

In December 2006, President Calderón started an “unprecedented federal counter-narcotics campaign that involved the countrywide deployment of up to 45,000 troops and federal security forces.”²⁵ These forces were concentrated on the northern states and cities that had drug trafficking corridors running north into the United States. At the same time he also reformed the extradition policy, which he has effectively used in dealing with captured drug cartel leaders. “Over the past several years Mexico has extradited an increasing number of alleged criminals to the United States. Extraditions from Mexico rose from 41 in 2005 to a record 95 in 2008.”²⁶ These steps taken by the Calderón administration have resulted in numerous arrests; confiscation of drugs, money, and assault weapons; and the extradition and prosecution of high profile drug leaders such as Osiel Cárdenas, the leader of the Gulf Cartel.

President Calderón has also unified and centralized the police command under a single commander. The Federal Security Police and the Federal Investigation Agency were operating as separate entities, which created stovepipe operations during investigations. *Jane’s Sentinel* country risk assessment stated that having these

independent security forces “created problems, delays, leaks and limited sharing of information.”²⁷ By placing the two organizations under one commander, President Calderón streamlined the investigation process and sent a message that Mexico must have a competent security force to bring justice to the drug cartels and make them accountable for their criminal activities.

President Calderón has done much to address corruption at the state and federal levels, but he must do more to eradicate the corruption from his government at all levels to restore public confidence in the Mexican government. Corruption has been a major issue for Mexico for numerous years. Reports indicate that the drug cartels use the vast amounts of bulk cash that move from the U.S. to Mexico to pay off officials in order to conduct their business unimpeded. “A series of arrests of high-ranking officials and local politicians during 2008 and 2009, including a senior officer in the state deputy attorney general’s office, the top-ranking liaison officer with Interpol, and a number of mayors in the western state of Michoacán”²⁸ illustrates how deep into state and federal organizations the drug cartels are able to influence. To defeat the drug cartels, the Mexican government must be successful in defeating corruption at the federal and state levels. Addressing corruption and restoring professionalism in their government officials will create public confidence in the ability of the government to provide a secure and stable environment.

If Mexico and the United States can combine their efforts to significantly reduce the flow of weapons and money from the U.S. into Mexico, then they will deny the drug cartels the money needed to fund their criminal activities. Steps are being implemented to fight the drug cartels by freezing their assets, which prohibits them from using the

banking systems to launder their money. “In June 2010, the Mexican ministry of finance announced new rules for currency transactions through banks in an effort to curb money laundering and organized crime.”²⁹ Additionally, Mexico’s Attorney General has said that in order for Mexico to defeat the drug cartels they need cooperation from the United States in stopping arms trafficking and money laundering from the United States to Mexico.³⁰ The United States must be more effective at curbing arms trafficking and money laundering moving south into Mexico to assist the Calderón administration in disrupting the drug cartels.

U.S. Strategy

In October 2007, the United States and Mexico agreed upon a proposal for the United States to provide counterdrug and anticrime assistance to Mexico called The Mérida Initiative. The Mérida Initiative provided \$1.4 billion in assistance to Mexico and Central America in the form of training and equipment from 2008-2010 with a large portion of the money going to Mexico to address the drug cartels. This initiative includes four primary goals:

(1) break the power and impunity of criminal organizations; (2) assist the Mexican and Central American governments in strengthening border, air, and maritime controls; (3) improve the capacity of justice systems in the region; and (4) curtail gang activity in Mexico and Central America and diminish drug demand in the region.³¹

In June 2008, Congress appropriated the initial amount of \$352 million to Mexico in the program areas of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and Economic Support Fund (ESF). The amount of funding each year since implementation is identified in Table 1 below.

(\$ in millions)

Account	FY2008 Suppl. Funds (P.L. 110-252)	FY2009 Bridge Funds (P.L. 110-252)	FY2009 Omnibus (P.L. 111-8)	FY2009 Supp. Funds (P.L. 111-32)	FY2010 Request
ESF	20.0	0.0	15.0	0.0	0
INCLE	215.5	48.0	246.0	160.0	450.0
FMF	116.5	0.0	39.0	260.0	0
Total	352.0	48.0	300.0	420.0	450.0

Sources: U.S. Department of State, FY2008 Supplemental Appropriations Spending Plan; P.L. 111-8, Omnibus Appropriations Act 2009 (Division H and Joint Explanatory Statement, H.R. 1105); FY2009 Supplemental Justification, Department of State & U.S. Agency for International Development; Conference Report to accompany H.R. 2346, House Report 111-151, and U.S. Department of State, "Summary and Highlights, International Affairs, Function 150, Fiscal Year 2010."

Table 1: FY2008-FY2010 Mérida Funding for Mexico by Aid Account.³²

The implementation of this initiative, however, has not been without its problems. The program has been slow to deliver assistance as authorized by the Mérida Initiative. By the end of the first year, "Government Accounting Office found that \$830 million of the \$1.3 billion in Mérida funds appropriated for Mexico and Central America had been obligated by the State Department, but only \$26 million of the funds had actually been spent."³³ However, since September 2009, over \$310 million worth of equipment and training has arrived in Mexico. This includes helicopters, software packages, and money to conduct training programs to improve the capability of the Mexican security forces. The State Department announced in November 2010 that they "delivered three Black Hawk UH-60M helicopters to the Government of Mexico's Federal Police Force (SSP)."³⁴ The United States must be able to accelerate the contracting process. Similar to the United States Army's Rapid Fielding Initiative, a program to rapidly procure the equipment once requirements are identified is necessary. A rapid procurement program would allow Mexican law enforcement authorities to receive the equipment and training

needed to disrupt the drug cartels' ability to control the drug trafficking corridors entering the United States along the Southwest Border.

Only by improving communication and cooperation between Mexico and the United States in the areas of intelligence, technology, training, and the elimination of corruption will the fight to disrupt and dismantle the drug cartels continue to be successful. The Mérida Initiative has increased cooperation between the United States and Mexican law enforcement agencies. It also has provided equipment and training that was greatly needed to improve its ability to fight the drug cartels. Although the Mérida Initiative is a recent program, it is already showing signs of success as the two government agencies are cooperating and exchanging intelligence along the Southwest Border. There are indications that cooperation between the two countries is having success against the drug cartels. A news release from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) stated that Project Deliverance, which is a DEA led multi-agency operation, over the past 22 months led to 2,266 arrests, seizure of \$154 million, 17.1 tons of drugs and the arrest of a high priority target in Mexico.³⁵ Attorney General Eric Holder stated that "this interagency, cross-border operation has been our most extensive, and most successful, law enforcement effort to date targeting these deadly cartels, and it is a direct result of our ongoing Southwest Border Strategy."³⁶ The continued success of the Mérida Initiative will be a crucial component in support of the recently published *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*.

The *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* was published in June 2009 with a strategic goal to "substantially reduce the flow of illicit drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence across the Southwest Border."³⁷ To accomplish

this goal, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy identified the following six strategic objectives:

- Enhance intelligence capabilities associated with the Southwest Border.
- Interdict drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence at the ports of entry, between the ports of entry, and in the air and maritime domains along the Southwest Border.
- Ensure the prosecution of all significant drug trafficking, money laundering, bulk currency, and weapons smuggling/trafficking cases.
- Disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations.
- Enhance counterdrug technologies for drug detection and interdiction along the Southwest Border.
- Enhance U.S. – Mexico cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts.³⁸

With the majority of funding going to the supply-side functions over the past several years, an important question to consider is whether this strategy is working to meet the goals of reducing drug flow into the United States along the Southwest Border. Between the Mérida Initiative and the National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy, the United States has devoted a majority of its overall National Drug Control resources on the supply-side functions. This has focused resources on programs such as domestic law enforcement, interdiction, and international support. Since 2001, the

supply-side functions have received an increase of funds each year at the detriment of demand reduction, which focuses on treatment and prevention. According to the Congressional Research Service, the supply-side functions are receiving 11% more of the total drug control budget than it did in 2001, while the demand-side functions are receiving 11% less of the total drug control budget in 2011 than it did in 2001.³⁹ It is time for the United States to rebalance the Federal Drug Control Budget to provide more resources toward the prevention of drug abuse and reduce the United States demand for drugs.

The United States government has prioritized its resources in the past years to supply-side functions to reduce the drug supply entering the United States. The question becomes whether or not this focus of resources enables the United States to meet its *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy's* strategic goal of substantially reducing the flow of illicit drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence across the Southwest Border. Four critical questions must be analyzed to determine whether this strategy is effective: (1) Have these policies improved United States-Mexican cooperation in the counterdrug effort? (2) Have these policies been effective in securing the Southwest Border? (3) Have these policies reduced the amount of drugs flowing into the United States along the Southwest Border? (4) Have these policies been successful at disrupting and dismantling the drug trafficking organizations?

Have these Policies Improved United States-Mexican Cooperation in the Counterdrug Effort? The Mérida Initiative has been successful at improving the cooperation between the United States and Mexican authorities. While this cooperation

is fundamental to the viability of the program, more attention and resources need to be directed to local and state police forces. By providing new equipment with state of the art technology, and training of law enforcement officials, each side was able to communicate more effectively by sharing intelligence about drug cartel activity. There is evidence that increased cooperation between the two countries using this advanced equipment is starting to produce positive results. On November 4, 2010, the Drug Enforcement Administration reported that “it has busted a significant cross-border, drug smuggling tunnel and netted about 30 tons of marijuana seized at two warehouses in the United States and Mexico.”⁴⁰ Once the United States officials found the tunnel on their side of the border, they contacted the Mexican military, who then conducted a search on the Mexican side of the border, which resulted in the confiscation of additional drugs, weapon cache, and an elaborate tunnel system. Great progress has been made through the Mérida Initiative to train the federal police forces; however, this makes up a small percentage of Mexico’s police forces nationwide. In an United States Senate report to the Committee of Foreign Relations it was pointed out that Mexican law enforcement officials “acknowledged that the larger challenge was to address local and state police forces, which comprise over 90 percent of the police forces nationwide and which suffered from corruption, mismanagement, and low levels of professionalism.”⁴¹ Security in local towns and cities depend on a professional police force to enforce the law. The United States must work more with Mexico’s local and state police forces to assist in developing professionalism, improved training techniques, and the sharing of intelligence. As the two countries build upon their relationships to combat against the

trafficking of illegal drugs, weapons, and money, they will become more successful at disrupting the drug cartels.

Have these Policies been Effective in Securing the Southwest Border? Securing our Southwest Border has been unsuccessful and is a growing security concern for the United States. Initial construction of a fence along the border was halted in lieu of a virtual fence. On January 14, 2011, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced the cancellation of [the] troubled virtual fence project along the Southwest Border.⁴² The strategy to secure between the ports of entry is the most vulnerable area in securing our Southwest Border. A Government Accountability Office report stated:

Border Patrol reported achieving varying levels of operational control for 873 of the nearly 2,000 southwest border miles at the end of fiscal year 2010.... GAO's preliminary analysis of the 873 border miles under operational control in 2010 showed that about 129 miles (15 percent) were classified as controlled and the remaining 85 percent were classified as managed.⁴³

Having secured only 44 percent of the Southwest Border makes it easy and profitable for drug and human smugglers to cross into the United States and is unacceptable with the security threats presently facing our nation. In a report to the House Committee on Homeland Security, it was stated that in 2005 approximately 650 illegal aliens were from special interests countries. They defined a special interest country as countries that could export individuals that could bring harm to the United States in the way of terrorism.⁴⁴ The first and most important security objective of the President is to secure the United States borders. Greater effort must be made to secure the Southwest Border if the United States is going to meet the goals and objectives it has set for its National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy.

Have these Policies Reduced the Amount of Drugs Flowing into the United States along the Southwest Border? The goal of reducing the drug flow into the United States along the Southwest Border has been met with limited success, and overall we are failing to meet the objective of reducing the amount of drugs entering the United States. The Federal-Wide Drug Seizure System indicates that between 2007 and 2009, there was a significant increase in seizures of illegal drugs. The increased seizures of heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana were 30.8 percent, 24 percent, and 16.9 percent respectively.⁴⁵ This appears to be a positive step in reducing the drug flow into the United States; however, in light of other factors such as increase in drug abuse, these statistics may indicate that the drug cartels are pushing greater amounts of drugs over the border to meet their supply demand. In accordance with the Office of National Drug Control Policy, from 2007 to 2009 the number of current illegal drug users age 12 and older increased by 1.9 million. This is an increase of almost 9 percent and “the perception of great risk in using marijuana either once a month or once or twice a week declined 9% and 7% respectively, from 2008 to 2009.”⁴⁶ These numbers indicate that the United States must take a holistic approach to reduce the amount of drugs entering through the Southwest Border. There must be a balance between the resources dedicated to supply reduction and demand reduction functions to be successful at diminishing drug flow into the United States. If the demand for drugs diminishes in the United States, then the drug cartels will relocate to other areas where the demand is high.

Have these Policies been Successful at Disrupting and Dismantling the Drug Trafficking Organizations? The Mérida Initiative’s assistance to the Mexican government

has enabled them to disrupt drug trafficking organizations starting in 2008; however, the Mexican government continues to battle these organizations today. According to the Department of State:

some significant government victories against the DTOs include the December 2009 killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva and January 2010 capture of Teodoro Garcia Simental, the extradition of 107 fugitives to the United States in 2009, and the [Government of Mexico] GMO's seizure of 92 tons of cocaine between December 2006 and March 2010.⁴⁷

Although President Calderón continues to make defeating the drug trafficking organizations a priority of his administration, all the efforts and resources applied to dismantle these organizations thus far has not been able to accomplish this objective. The Mexican government has been successful at severely disrupting the drug trafficking organizations; however, when the government is successful at disrupting one drug trafficking organization, another is ready to take advantage of the vacuum created to take control of these vital drug trafficking corridors. The efforts by the Mexican government and the United States Southwest Border policies have not succeeded at dismantling the drug trafficking organizations. These strategic policies need more time to mature before a determination is made whether they are successful at dismantling drug trafficking organizations.

Recommendations

Providing an effective strategy toward reducing the flow of drugs into the United States is a complex problem and one that requires a holistic approach to solving. There are three recommendations the United States must implement if they are going to be successful in accomplishing their goal of substantially reducing the flow of illicit drugs across the Southwest Border.

The required resources must be available to secure the Southwest Border. Whether the United States needs to build a fence, increase Border Patrol agents, use technology to secure the border, or a combination of multiple efforts, the United States must affect a more cohesive plan to secure its Southwest Border. The evidence that the southern border is not secure is compelling. Hal Brands of the *Strategic Studies Institute* wrote, “the permeability of the U.S. - Mexican border allows for easy transit into the United States, and Mexico’s share of the drug trade has grown steadily over the past 15 years.”⁴⁸ The call up of 1200 National Guard soldiers for one year by the administration is a temporary and inadequate solution to address this deficiency. The United States government has knowledge that non-Mexican illegal aliens enter the United States through the Southwest Border with the intent to do harm, such as a terrorist attack. This is a compelling trend that certainly justifies the resources required to properly secure the Southwest border.

The United States has placed the majority of its resources toward supply-side functions and has experienced limited success at reducing the flow of drugs into the United States. It is time to look at the problem with a more holistic view and place more resources toward the demand-side functions, with a priority going to prevention. Currently, the United States is spending \$1.718 billion on prevention, which is only 11% of the overall drug control budget. Putting more resources toward a successful prevention program would reduce the demand for drugs and would save dollars in the long term by reducing the number of people who require treatment for drug addiction. These resources could focus on educating our young people on the health risks of drug use, reducing the demand for illegal drugs in the United States. Many experts believe

that the reason cocaine levels have dropped in the United States is because of the greater demand for the drug in Europe. The United States must find the right balance between supply reduction and demand reduction to have an effective policy to defeat the drug trafficking organizations.

The next phase of the Mérida Initiative must dedicate more resources in developing the judicial institutions within the Mexican government. Local and State police forces are key to upholding the law. There has been some success at the federal level to eradicate corruption; however, the local and state police forces are still plagued with excessive corruption. "Corruption has long been endemic to Mexico, and among aspiring elites, a government post is still often seen more as a means of personal enrichment than as a vehicle for disinterested public service."⁴⁹ The history of corruption in Mexico has had an adverse effect on cooperation between the two countries' security forces. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article on September 10, 2010, stated that "U.S. agencies remain wary of sharing their most sensitive intelligence because of concerns that some of their Mexican counterparts may be on the payroll of the cartels."⁵⁰ Corrupt public officials on both sides of the border cannot be tolerated and must be actively prosecuted, and the penalties must be severe enough to encourage public officials to act responsibly. More dialogue between the countries is needed to address this issue with an agreement to increase penalties and cooperate in the investigations and prosecutions of offenders to these crimes. Effective collaboration will occur when each country is successful in cracking down on corrupt officials. Only then will the public express trust and confidence in their state and government officials.

Conclusion

The Mexican drug cartels have become sophisticated and violent organizations that have developed networks throughout U.S. cities using gangs to distribute drugs and conduct illegal activities. President Calderón, after his election in 2006, vowed to take direct action against the drug cartels and make it the top priority of his administration. The conflict between the drug cartels over control of the drug trafficking corridors leading into the U.S. and the Mexican government forces who are fighting to defeat the drug cartels have caused instability throughout Mexico, especially to the northern region. The drug cartels' dramatic increase in violence and methods of intimidation against the civilian populace are indications that they are moving in the direction of a narco-insurgency. In December 2010, a U.S. Border Patrol agent was shot and killed in a gun fight with "heavily armed suspects awaiting a drug load north of the Arizona-Mexico border."⁵¹ Events like this and the increase of kidnappings in the Border States have concerned U.S. officials of the possibility of "spillover violence" that could affect our national security.

The *Mérida Initiative* and *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*, if properly executed, will give the assistance required for the Mexican forces to disrupt the drug cartels by providing new equipment. They will also increase intelligence cooperation, provide law enforcement training, and encourage cooperation between the Mexico-United States governments to defeat this threat. The recommendations outlined in this paper are intended to reinforce the implementation of these policies. Only when the United States and Mexican governments work together to interdict drug supply and reduce demand for drugs in a collaborated effort will long-term success be attainable.

Endnotes

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